the Progressive
409 East Main Street, Madison, WI 53703

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Mr. Harold Weisberg
7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Harold Weisberg:

Thank you for your letter of May 13. I appreciate the concern that prompted you to write, but I must hasten to correct your apparent assumption that I have somehow failed to inform myself about the situation in the Middle East. On the contrary: My interest in Israel and in the Palestinian people verges on the obsessive.

You begin your letter by establishing your credentials as "a non-practicing, first-generation American Jew whose parents could never bring themselves to even mention the kind of lives they lived in the Ukraine and Besarabia." Fair enough. I am a non-practicing immigrant American Jew, born in Vienna, a refugee from the Holocaust much of whose family died in the Nazi death camps. Among the survivors, many of my relatives live now in Israel. Some of them share the perspectives I hold, which you have seen reflected in the pages of The Progressive; others do not.

I have visited the Middle East, have interviewed Israelis and Palestinians of varied backgrounds and perspectives, have reported from the West Bank and Israel. I have read, and continue to read, a great deal about the region (including Paul Johnson's rather disappointing recent history of the Jews). So much for credentials.

You ask whether I have thought about the history of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Unfortunately, there isn't much history to think of; until very recently, the Palestinian leadership has been unwilling to contemplate negotiations with Israel, and the Israelis have insisted that they "will not negotiate with terrorists"--even though the Israeli government is and has been headed by men who were terrorists when they were fighting for their own homeland. Nonetheless, in the last couple of years there has been a distinct shift in the position of the PLO, a declared willingness to enter into negotiations, and an implied readiness to come to terms with the reality of Israel. There has been no shift whatever in the Israeli position.

You talk about the terrible and tragic fratricide among the Arabs and ask why this isn't dealt with in The Progressive. I'm surprised that the

reason eludes you: The Progressive is an American magazine published for American readers. Our prime purpose is to provide information and analysis that American citizens can use in assessing and, we hope, influencing the course of events in this country and abroad. We, as Americans, are not responsible for the ghastly crimes committed in the Arab world. We are responsible for the crimes committed by the government of Israel, which is sustained and supported by the U.S. Government and bankrolled by our tax dollars.

You talk about "the Muslim tyrannies" in the Middle East, and you are absolutely right in characterizing them in that fashion. But Israel is not waging war against those Muslim tyrannies; it is waging war against an impoverished people whose homeland is under occupation, whose homes are bulldozed, whose land is seized by force or filched by legal fraud, and whose perfectly understandable aspirations for self-government are treated with contempt. I'm sure you do not mean to suggest that the villagers of the West Bank and Gaza must pay for the sins of the Saudis and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, let alone for the crimes of the Nazis.

It is one of the terrible ironies of history--and a profound personal tragedy for me--that a people, my people, after suffering thousands of years of persecution, have become persecutors. In Israel, I encountered anti-Arab racism that matches any bigotry I've seen anywhere in the world. If Israel continues on its present course, an Israeli friend told me recently, it will be "Northern Ireland at the bottom and South Africa at the top." That is not the future I want for Israel.

As you suggest, the situation in the Middle East is terribly complex. There is only one dead certainty: the Arabs will always be there. If the Jews want to be there, too, they had better come to terms with that certainty and think in terms of peace, not war.

That's my perspective. You need not share it, of course, but please don't attribute it to ignorance or indifference.

Sincerely,

Erwin Knoll

Erwin Knoll
Editor

EK/tt